

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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CSM teacher sits on multi-state panel (Log Cabin Democrat, Conway)

The state education department recently chose Carl Stuart Middle School teacher TK Gault to represent Arkansas in a multi-state panel charged with recommending the passing score on the new Common Core aligned Praxis II Middle School English Language Arts Exam, according to a news release.

Gault traveled to the campus of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, N.J., to participate in the standard setting panel. The panel consisted of 13 teachers from all over the country and selected for their expertise in English Language Arts, their ability to bring diverse perspectives and for their knowledge of the teaching profession.

Gault and the 12 other panelists reviewed the assessment, provided independent judgments and engaged in panel-wide discussions to determine the minimum score to be considered qualified to enter the English Language Arts profession. The state of Arkansas will use the panel's recommendation to decide the minimum passing score requirement to be applied for licensure. ETS will administer the new edition of the Middle School English Language Arts test during the 2013-2014 testing year.

Should we arm the educators? (Pine Bluff Commercial, Commentary by Steve Brawner)

Steve Anderson, superintendent of the Lake Hamilton School District, slid what looked like a business card across the table. It's actually a commissioned security officer license. He also carries a badge and, on five occasions during the last 12 years, a gun on campus.

The Lake Hamilton school campuses are far enough from local law enforcement that a madman could kill a lot of people before help could arrive. So, as part of a response plan created by the previous superintendent, the school is licensed as a private security firm. A handful of staff members, like Anderson, have commissioned security officer licenses and access to locked up guns and body armor.

Anderson has held his license for 12 years. Five times he has strapped on a gun – twice after last year's Sandy Hook Elementary shootings to calm a nervous staff, twice when a manhunt was occurring in his area, and once when a parent called the school suspecting a child had stolen a handgun and taken it on campus.

He knows how this might look to outsiders. "I'm not a Rambo. I'm not a John Wayne-type. I'm a schoolteacher," he said. "I'm not a law enforcement officer. I'm not a Navy SEAL. But I'm going to take care of my kids."

Anderson and three other superintendents were in Little Rock on Wednesday to attend a press conference by Asa Hutchinson, director of the National Rifle Association's National School Shield initiative and candidate for Arkansas governor in 2014.

The National School Shield is the NRA's response to the Sandy Hook shootings. Hutchinson released a preliminary report recommending, as one option, providing 40 to 60 hours of security training to school staff members, especially in schools that cannot hire sufficient professional guards. That way, in an emergency, at least someone is somewhat prepared to shoot a shooter. Hutchinson emphasized that staff members other than teachers should undergo the training.

A group of about 15 superintendents met with Hutchinson a couple of months ago to provide their input on the issue. That meeting, along with others held across the country, helped squelch an idea to let armed volunteers protect campuses. Volunteers can be inconsistent and hard to manage, and superintendents didn't want them packing heat on campus.

For school superintendents, security is now a constant concern. Nancy Anderson with the Cutter Morning Star district, who also attended the press conference, plans to get her own license. Darin Beckwith with the Fountain Lake School District often imagines how he would respond to a school violence scenario. Recently, a real estate agent told a client they could park a Ryder truck next to the campus overnight but neglected to tell the school. A Ryder truck is what Timothy McVeigh used to carry the explosives in the Oklahoma City bombing. Beckwith and his staff spent two hours trying to figure out what was going on.

Steve Anderson emphasizes that Lake Hamilton's approach isn't for everyone. Most districts probably will find other ways of beefing up their security besides arming administrators. Every district has a different culture and different needs. On a personal level, people have varying experiences with guns and differing levels of trust in their administrators.

There also are practical concerns. Arming school staff members and bringing guns on campus likely would add to schools' liability and affect their insurance. And of course, no training, no matter how intense, can transform three or four school administrators into a SWAT team.

On the other hand, what are they supposed to do in the unlikely event that someone is walking around the campus shooting at their students as fast as he can pull the trigger? Hide? Throw a stapler at him?

So what do you think? Is arming administrators one of the answers for protecting schools from madmen or mad kids?

It's a shame we've got to ask the question.

Bee Branch's Rooney named Outstanding Teacher by Farm Bureau (Newton County Times)

LITTLE ROCK — Lori Rooney, a family and consumer science teacher at South Side Bee Branch High School in Van Buren County, is Arkansas Farm Bureau's 2013 Ag in the Classroom Outstanding Teacher. Rooney was recognized during a special ceremony at the school April 3.

Senate OKs election-related bills (Pine Bluff Commercial)

LITTLE ROCK —The Senate approved measures Saturday that would create a Voter Integrity Unit within the secretary of state's office and make destruction of a ballot or ballot materials a felony, punishable by up to six years in prison.

The House passed a bill that would allow the sale of unpasteurized milk in Arkansas.

Both chambers convened a rare weekend session Saturday as lawmakers work to clear a backlog of legislation pending action in an attempt to meet an April 19 deadline for completing the business of the regular session. Final adjournment is set for May 17.

Senate Bill 719 by Sen. Bryan King, R-Greenwood, which would create a four member Voter Integrity Unit passed 30-5 in the Senate and goes to the House.

The unit would include the director of the secretary of state's elections division as chairman, the attorney for the secretary of state's office, one employee of the elections division and one state capitol police officer.

The unit would investigate any complaint filed with the state Board of Election Commissioners alleging voter irregularities or fraud. The unit would have the authority to hold hearings, seek witness testimony and present evidence. It would refer allegations to a prosecutor or the state police, King said.

The unit also would have to report any investigation findings to the the State Agencies and Governmental Affairs committees in both the House and Senate.

In presenting the bill, King referred to the case of former state Rep. Hudson Hallum as an example of voter fraud in the state but said the proposal was not filed directly in response to that one particular incident.

"Carroll County has had a history of election irregularities that can't be explained," said King, who served on the Carroll County Election Commission for a time.

Hallum, a Democrat from Marion, resigned his House seat last year after pleading guilty to a federal vote fraud charge stemming from a 2011 special election which Hallum won.

Also Saturday, the Senate approved King's SB 961, which would make the destruction of ballot or ballot materials a felony, punishable by one to six years in prison, and up to a \$10,000 fine. It passed 35-0 and goes to the House.

Negligent homicide

SB 874 by Sen. Jason Rapert, R-Conway, which would add sleep deprivation, or fatigue, to the negligent homicide statute. The bill passed 23-2 and goes to the House.

Under the bill, police and prosecutors would have to prove that a person charged with negligent homicide involving a traffic death had been awake for at least 24 hours, and that he or she was aware of it and deliberately deprived himself or herself of sleep.

"This is for someone who gets behind the wheel ... knowing they should not do so," Rapert said, adding that the law would give police and prosecutors an extra tool under the negligent homicide statute.

A conviction would be a Class B felony, punishable by up to 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$15,000.

Rapert said police in Conway and Conway County have investigated cases where the driver of a car involved in a fatal accident had been awake for more than 24 hours and in once case the driver bragged about it before driving.

Raw milk sales

In the House, House Bill 1536 to allow the sale of unpasteurized milk in the state passed on a 60-19 vote and goes to the Senate.

Under the bill by Rep. Randy Alexander, R-Fayetteville, unpasteurized milk could be sold legally at dairy farms provided annual sales do not exceed 500 gallons.

The bill would require that warnings be posted at the point of sale and on milk containers informing consumers that the milk has not been pasteurized and that the milk and the farm have not been inspected by the state.

Alexander told House members he is a "city boy" and had never tasted raw milk until Friday, but he said he supports letting adults make decisions for themselves.

"This is a liberty issue," he said.

Speaking against the bill, Rep. Tommy Thompson, D-Morrilton, said the state Department of Health, the state Department of Agriculture, the Arkansas Farm Bureau, the Arkansas Milk Stabilization Board and the Dairy Farmers of America all oppose it. He said milk that is not pasteurized can contain dangerous pathogens.

"I personally don't want to be responsible for voting for something that could give even one child in Arkansas E. coli," he said.

But Rep. David Meeks, R-Conway, said as long as people know the risks involved, they should be able to buy raw milk.

"I'm asking you today to vote for freedom," he said.

As shout of "Freedom!" was heard from the House floor as members cast their ballots.

Primate registration

The Senate also passed HB 1391 by Rep. Warwick Sabin, D-Little Rock, which would require owners of primates to register their animals with the county sheriff's office.

The bill aligns the state's standards for caring for primates with those of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It passed 35-0 and goes to the governor.

ATRS contribution rate

The House voted 58-22 to approve SB 162 by Sen. Eddie Cheatham, D-Crossett, which would allow the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System to raise the employer contribution rate from 14 percent to 15 percent if necessary to keep the system fiscally sound, but House Speaker Davy Carter, R-Cabot, ordered that the bill not be transmitted back to the Senate.

The House approved the bill after rejecting a motion by Rep. Duncan Baird, R-Lowell, co-chairman of the Joint Budget Committee, to refer the bill back to that committee. Baird said the bill as written could cost the state \$23 million a year in general revenue and needed further study. Carter told reporters later he wanted to keep the bill in the House for now so questions about its fiscal impact could be answered.

Other House action

Other bills the House approved included:

—HB 1999 by Rep. Nate Bell, R-Mena, which would limit the number of special license plates available through the state Department of Finance and Administration to the number in effect on Jan. 1, 2014. It also would require DF&A to discontinue any plate currently in circulation if fewer than 500 are in use, but it would allow the people who have the discontinued plates to continue using them for up to 10 years. The bill passed 78-6 and goes to the Senate.

—HB 2039 by Rep. Andy Mayberry, R-Hensley, which would allow high schools across the state to take part, if they choose, in the College and Career Coaches Program, currently a pilot program that hires people to work with high school students to prepare them for college or careers. The bill passed 54-14 and goes to the Senate.

—HB 1761 by Rep. James Ratliff, D-Imboden, which would allow the Educational Excellence Trust Fund to be used to increase teachers' pay for experience or advanced degrees. The bill passed 52-29 and goes to the Senate.

—SB 258 by Sen. David Sanders, R-Little Rock, which would require the state Parole Board to issue a warrant for the arrest of a parolee who has committed a violent or sexual felony while on parole. The bill passed 82-2 and goes to the governor.

—SB 260 by Sanders, which would require the state Department of Community Correction to prepare a report on the number of inmates under supervision for the last five years who would be considered repeat offenders under the definition of recidivism. It also would change that definition to include people who are re-arrested after release, regardless of whether they have been convicted. The bill passed 54-24 and goes to the Senate.

Polling places

Elsewhere Saturday, the Senate State Agencies and Governmental Affairs Committee endorsed an amended version of HB 1712 by Rep. Ken Bragg, which would prohibit anyone other than voters and authorized officials from being present in a polling place during voting. The bill originally included a ban on using an electronic device to take a photo of a ballot, but Bragg said he removed that language from the bill after concerns were raised that it might violate the First Amendment. The bill goes to the Senate.

The committee also endorsed HB 1855 by Rep. Matthew Shepherd, R-El Dorado, which would make prosecuting attorney elections nonpartisan. The bill goes to the Senate.

High-schooler aims for perfection, hits it (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Yeongwoo Hwang of Jonesboro took the ACT college entrance exam for the first time last summer after purchasing and going through a practice book. He also took a practice course offered through his homeschool program.

He scored a 35 - one point shy of a perfect score.

Hwang moved on. He enrolled at the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts in Hot Springs. And in January, midway through the school year, he decided to take the ACT exam a second time.

He wanted to attain a score on the optional writing part of the test that he did not take the first go-around. He said he didn't have as much time to practice for the second test because of class work.

"When I went into the test the second time I wasn't as focused as I was the first time on the actual subject areas because I knew I had a 35," he recalled.

"I wasn't as worried. I was mainly focusing on just the essays. When I exited the test, I felt I had done pretty well on all the parts. I felt the ACT was easier the second time, probably because I was more confident and I had already taken it. I felt pretty good about it."

Hwang, a 16-year-old junior, earned the top composite score of 36, his school announced.

Less than one-tenth of 1 percent of students who take the ACT earn the top score, according to the ACT. For the recently graduated Class of 2012, a total of 781 of the more than 1.66 million test-takers in the nation earned a 36 while 4,457 earned a 35.

In Arkansas, only six students in the Class of 2012 earned a 36 composite score out of the 26,058 test-takers in that class.

Each of the four sections of the exam - English, math, reading and science - is graded on a 1 to 36 scale. The four sections are averaged together for the composite score.

Hwang said he missed only one question in the subject area exams and that was on the English part of the test, which still gave him a 36 on that section.

He intends to take the ACT again. He wants to raise his score on the writing part of the test. On that section, a student must write an essay on a topic presented during the test.

Hwang, who moved to the United States from Korea at age 3, attended elementary school in several states. He was home-schooled in grades eight through 10. His mother, Kyoungsuk Ahn, is a homemaker. His father, Yeonsang Hwang, is a civil-engineering professor at Arkansas State University's Jonesboro campus.

After graduating from high school, Yeongwoo Hwang plans to major in computer science in college. His college preferences are the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Carnegie Mellon University.

In the meantime, the high school junior, who is known around his Hot Springs campus for his colorful athletic shoes - first an orange pair and now red - will continue to enjoy the Arkansas math, science and arts school where he is a member of the student government association and the Beta Club, as well as part of the school's competitive robotics program.

Bill Currier, dean of students at the Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts, estimated that the residential school for talented juniors and seniors averages one student per year who earns a 36 on the college entrance exam, with greater numbers earning 34s and 35s.

He described Hwang as a "quiet leader" who has in his first year at the residential school involved himself in several activities.

"He's walking the talk rather than talking it," Currier said. "He's [a] very serious, very nice, very polite young man."

Arkansas lawmakers convene for rare Saturday session (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Arkansas lawmakers are gathering at the Capitol for a rare weekend session as they try to wrap up their work by a self-imposed April 19 deadline.

The House and Senate planned to meet Saturday as lawmakers are completing work on a tax cut package, a proposed health insurance expansion and the budget for the coming year. The Senate on Friday approved a proposal to use federal Medicaid funds to purchase private insurance for 250,000 low-income residents, but the proposal faces roadblocks in the House.

Lawmakers are considering the "private option" proposal as an alternative to expanding Medicaid under the federal health care law. Gov. Mike Beebe has said the savings from the proposal could pay for a substantial amount of tax cuts the Legislature is considering.